

# aye, and gomorrah

STORIES

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generosity and my power! And my friendship. I have no objection to such sygns. Though I laugh . . . !” Vondramach took a breath, and another, and a third.

She stood awhile—not alone: she had not traveled alone for years, though the majority of what accompanied her was mechanical, much of it miniature, and most of it out of sight. Vondra watched Pretania-IV flicker on the night sea. Then, as Gylda had done minutes before, she walked down the rocks to begin the brief journey back to Omegahelm.

—London  
October 1973

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## among the blobs

(1) “I’m terribly sorry, ma’am. I’m sorry.” He swayed, one arm raised, torso stalled in the torque of its own turning. His name was Joe. To one side of his back was, not a pain nor even a feeling, but rather a sensational ghost, an unformed blob, where she had lurched against his army jacket, or he had backed into her tweed. “Are you all right?” She probably couldn’t hear because of the subway car’s roar. “You okay?”

“Yes.” (Was she confused a little, a little bewildered?) “That’s all right.” Swaying by the pole, her fuchsia scarf pulled through something gold, amoeboid, and splattered with ruby glass, she looked like one of the black Miss Subways. He had no idea if she were five years older or five years younger than he. Joe turned, because after all, all he’d done was bump her a little; or she’d bumped him. But I could have smiled, he thought, reaching for and missing and then getting the next hanger. He knew his smile was good. (2) And Bat D—, in a rocket of luciprene-6 with vytrol fittings, careened at ballistic speeds through interstellar night. Flakes had fallen off the black, letting in light: stars. Bat was dubious and alert, with the belly feeling that is both anxiety and enthusiasm. His would be the first human encounter with the Blob—which had been reported flütchüllätting (a form of communication? digestion? play?) in sector E-3. Till this report Bat D—, of the blazing death-laser, slayer of twenty-seven seven-foot Uranites, hero of the Kpt rebellion on Fomalhaut-G, had poohed the existence of Blobs, but the closer his luciprene hull swooped toward Galactic Council, the more indubitable seemed the Blob’s particular order of ontological resolution—what an earlier, less vulgar epoch would have called her “reality.” (3) And Joe, on the Broadway Local, headed for Forty-Second, wearing a Pendle-

ton that didn't look it because his friend Joe—another Joe—had been in with his truck the day before yesterday, and the two of them had worked on the transmission six hours up at the Dyckman Street garage.

One train door stuck.

Army jacket open, Joe hammered up the concrete steps to the station concourse, loped under pipes and fluorescent fixtures, passed the rack of phone booths, the doughnut emporium. Another twenty-five steps and the florist concession pressed dull plants against glass; then down past the stall of Latin records, across from the hot-dog-pasteles, piña-colada-Coca-Cola-cuchifrito counter, and toward the BMT.

Joe had been moving all this time through the late rush-hour crowds, which crowds we have not mentioned till now because he was just about to separate himself from them. Joe thought of these crowds as a Blob, to which he was by and large indifferent.

Neither the Blob nor Joe's indifference, however, were impregnable to analysis. There were the men, of whom he was vaguely resentful, because if he stood too close to one in the crush, or sat too close to one on a subway seat—too much body contact—they might suspect he was not a heterosexual lustful-panting-monster, and the grapevine had it they could get hostile toward the other kind. There were the women, of whom he was vaguely resentful, because, since everyone knew all men were heterosexual lustful-panting-monsters, if he bumped one or brushed one (not to mention stood too near or sat too close), he had to apologize, be appallingly polite, and generally come on far more deferentially than any normal human should be expected to to establish that, indeed, he was *not* a heterosexual lustful-panting-monster. At twenty-six, actually, he knew how to deal with the men: stand or sit where you want and fuck 'em. They could move. The women, however, confused him a little, bewildered him. And women were a subject about which the grapevine was distressingly un- (if not ill-) informed. Resentment, however vague, is not pleasant; hence the indifference in which he traveled.

At the blue and white column, Joe swung left toward the john.

The wooden gate—not, this time, "Closed for Cleaning"—was wedged back, askew on its hinges. Some time ago they'd painted the tiled entrance hall blue. Hand-sized paint flakes had fallen away. The antiseptic with which the place was flushed every other day had blistered what paint remained. Sometimes it left fumes so strong you couldn't stay inside long enough to take an honest leak.

In front of five of the ten porcelain urinals—most of the brass flush-treadles lay without tension on the red-tiled floor—(4) half the Galactic Council was in attendance. It was a highly formalized gathering. Members came and went according to an arcane protocol Bat D— still did not understand. Each member entered the High and Icy Hall (here and there still crossed with traces of unbreatheable fumes) to linger, silently and intently for an arbitrary while, before what looked to Bat D—for all the world like something from a book on Twentieth-Century toilet fixtures.

The members of the Council were laboring to express the Blob.

The Blob was not impregnable to analysis: it was a largely mucoid emulsion contained in a selectively permeable membrane within which drifted a nucleus, various nucleoli, vacuoles, ribosomes, mitochondria, and chloroplasts, the whole a symbiotic intrusion of eukaryotic and prokaryotic cells from a less vulgar moment in the pluroma when all was closer than it is today to organic soup, to inorganic matter.

The Council members, minds on high matters, manipulated their computers.

The Blob was, appropriately, near Betelgeuse.

And Betelgeuse was in E-3. (5) Joe lingered at the next-to-the-end urinal. He had a thing for older guys with big, heavily veined cocks and small hands with overlong nails; and the guy to his left, at the end urinal (Pushing sixty? But that was all right), was probably a librarian. He wore a dumb-silly coat with a fur collar you couldn't button up. Or a designer. The black portfolio leaned on the wall behind them. But that was all right.

A bum lurched through the door (probably not as old as this guy beside him with those long, long nails the color of aluminum in winterlight. In his own too wide, too horny hand, at the memory

only a second old—rather than at what was beside him—Joe hardened), mustache full of mucus, missing a lot of hair over one ear, missing shirt buttons; and the breast pocket gone: His pants leg was ripped, knee to cuff, showing a shin like soap. The bum looked around: “Aw, Jesus Christ, nothin’ in here but a bunch of . . . I mean ever’body in here is one of them fuckin’ . . . Hey you there, I bet you’re one of . . .”

To Joe’s right, two members of the Galactic Council glanced at each other, smiled. One shook his head. Hands down before white porcelain, busy with calculations, they manipulated and manipulated.

Wilson, the deaf-mute hustler, fists pouched in his frayed wind-breaker, came bopping in. Joe knew him because Wilson had once tried to score from Joe, who had bought him a cup of coffee at the hot dog counter across the concourse and explained to him—Joe had two aunts who had been born deaf and with whom he had stayed for a year in Portland when he was ten, which is how he knew the deaf-and-dumb sign language—that at this particular spot there was just too much of it walking around for free to make it worth a working man’s time. Wilson came around the bum (“Hey, you ain’t interested in these fuckin’ faggots, huh . . . ?”), surveyed the Council Members at their stalls, and left.

“Shit . . . !” The bum turned, started out, stumbled into the jamb. An incoming Member—a subway worker Joe had seen here a few times before—steadied him:

“Hey, watch it, old man.”

The worker moved the bum out to arm’s length and looked down to see a dripping cuff; and the shin was wet. Not having made it to a stall, the bum lurched out, leaving sneaker piss-prints on the chalky floor.

Joe turned back to the man beside him: gray hair, Vandyke beard, glasses. They exchanged glances, anxious, enthusiastic, eye to lens, lens to groin. That crank (Joe had grown up in Seattle), those nails: Joe felt the warmth of orgasm heating the backs of his knees.

(6) The salmon light of Betelgeuse slanted through the clear wall of Sumpter VII, the Fort named—jokingly—by the first generation

of galactic anthropologists, how many years ago now . . . ? And where were they today: reduced to inert jelly during the tragic Kpt. Now, this Blob . . . ? Bat D—walked across reddened tiles of luciprene-57 past the Fort’s transparent north facade, that looked out across the magnetic sands webbed with molten ammonia runulets worming the hyperborean chill, toward the sheer range called Chroma—because of the pink, fuchsia, and vermilion clays streaking its silver slopes. Warily, Bat turned from the window-wall to round a partition studded with ruby vytrol—

She quivered there within the high, luminous geometries of Sumpter VII, contracting her gargantuan bulk inward from those bloated pseudopods into which her viscid soap-collared stuffs had spread. Nucleoli and vacuoles and just plain bubbles puckered her membrane. She could sense him, Bat could tell. Languorously, she heaved herself forward.

Bat D—’s thumb snapped open the cover of his Naugahyde holster. He tugged loose his death-laser, its handle of black ivory worked into rare scrimshaw by the Little Folk of Antares-10, its symmetrically veined and partitioned barrel molded of clear lucite casting resin by Jonas and Barboli of Fenton, Pennsylvania. Carefully, Bat raised the gun.

The Blob said: “Burble, burble . . . burble.” She flattened her amoeboid volume slightly, then heaved again.

Bat fired—and a pseudopod, a little charred, smoking a little, dropped from the ceiling and knocked the death-laser fifteen feet to crack the partition. Ruby vytrol chattered to the floor, glittered on the tiles.

Bat D—, terrified and exuberant, stepped back. The Blob, enraged, hurled herself. Bat D—shrieked and flung up his arms. She smacked him, knee to chin, with a strange and violet warmth that flattened him to the ground. She rolled across him, was in him at every orifice—ears, urethra, anus, mouth, nostrils. She was without him. She was within him. She rolled through him. She flowed around him.

While he lay, gloriously stalled within her circling torque, with her within him within her, the Blob said: “Honey, what’s *with* this

shit resenting strange niggers on the subway? *That sort of double-think* earns you no popcorn coupons from the Big Movie Theater in the sky. Try to imagine an older, less vulgar epoch. Just be your sweet self—you *have* a lovely smile. But Lord, this luciprene is getting to me. Tastes like old airplane glue!"

For a moment Bat D—thought he would really die. But the Blob withdrew. Letting a howl that resembled nothing so much as the Twentieth-Century war-whoop of Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, she flung herself at Fort Sumpter VII's north wall.

It shattered.

Eyes still tight, Bat heard fragments thud outward on the sand, clatter inward to the floor.

Moments later when, panting and weak, he pulled himself erect beside the jagged pane—already frosting with ammonia from the hyperborean chill—the Blob, a football field away, was flütcülätting (a method of transportation? reproduction? art?) across the black sands, making her erratic path between runulets, toward the Chroma's ceramic and silver. (7) Joe leaned his forehead on the tile above the urinal, taking deep breaths.

The man beside him zipped his fly, squeezed Joe's jacketed elbow (with that *fine* hand), and whispered: "You know, fellow, you really get into it, don't you?" (One of the Council's feyer members had actually applauded. Another had gotten scared and run.) "You're too much. . . . Maybe I'll see you in here again sometime . . . ?"

Without lifting his head, Joe grinned; and nodded—because when, on the odd Thursday you found somebody that much what you were into, it took a minute to get it back together. Faint pain pulsed in his spleen—he'd come that hard. He stuffed himself back in his fly, took another breath, looked up—

The man, and his portfolio, were gone.

On the urinal edge, semen trailed the glaze.

Joe shouldered out between two more arriving members (the blue door was marked E-3) and nearly bumped the incoming policeman. Joe grinned at the cop, nodded; automatically, the cop smiled, nodded back—then apparently remembered himself and frowned.

But Joe was already making it down the concrete ramp to the RR—when two high-school girls collided with him from behind. As he turned, "I'm sorry!" started up behind his teeth, but he chewed and chomped it into, "Hello . . ." And smiled.

One girl giggled over her packages. The other, with more packages, blinked.

After a moment the blinking one said, hesitantly: "Oh . . . excuse me."

"That's okay," Joe said. "What *are* all those?"

The packages were part of an exhibit they were setting up at the Brooklyn Public Library on the history of Puerto Rico. They talked about it through three trains. When they did say good-bye, all three of them were grinning a lot—grinning too much, Joe decided once he was in the car.

Well, old habits die hard. So kill a little harder. Interesting kids, Joe thought. Maybe he should check out the exhibit. Perhaps next Wednesday, after he'd finished standing around at Unemployment. And he would be at the Fourteenth Street john in ten minutes—unless he stopped in at Twenty-third, which, the grapevine had it, was sort of kicky this month.

—New York  
February 1976